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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Announces Arms Trafficking Arrest

(Phoenix, Ariz. – April 3, 2008) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced that Victor Varela, 23, of Columbus, New Mexico, has been charged with one count of fraudulent schemes and artifices, a class 2 felony, through a direct complaint filed in Maricopa County Superior Court.

Goddard was joined by William Newell, Special Agent in Charge for the Phoenix Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosive, and U.S. Marshal David Gonzales at a press conference to announce this arrest.

"Illegal trafficking of weapons has become a major component of many cross-border crimes," Goddard said. "These arms sales figured prominently in the grim statistic of some 2,000 Mexican law enforcement officers killed last year alone. We are targeting these sales and working closely with other law enforcement agencies in both the U.S. and Mexico to stop them."

Varela was arrested Wednesday in Tucson. According to court documents, he is alleged to have fraudulently purchased through a confidential informant two .50 caliber rifles for more than \$6,700 last September in Maricopa County. Varela is also alleged to have asked the informant to purchase several handguns and attempted to purchase a fully automatic M-60 machine gun for \$30,000.

"This investigation exemplifies the commitment of ATF and the State of Arizona to work together to cut off the illegal flow of firearms to violent criminals operating along the U.S.-Mexico border," Newell said. "The Arizona Attorney General's Office is to be applauded for its commitment to work with ATF to address the concerns of the Government of Mexico regarding the illegal trafficking of firearms."

According to ATF, the Mexican Army two months ago seized an arsenal from a safe house that included the two .50 caliber rifles and other weapons linked to Varela. Several of the weapons connected to him have been traced to crimes committed in Mexico by drug cartels.

"This arrest is a direct reflection of our commitment to combat arms trafficking and assist not only law enforcement agencies within the United States but our international partners as well," Gonzales said.

If convicted of all charges, Varela faces up to 12.5 years in prison. He is scheduled to appear in court on April 9. The charges are the result of a joint investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the U.S. Marshal's Office and the Attorney General's Office. Assistant Attorney General Patrick Zinicola is prosecuting this case.

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